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At meal-times a cat took up a vantage point under the dining-table, to filch what it could. It was never caressed or deliberately fed; the whole Balkans believed that either indulgence would stop it from catching mice.

A man and his wife, with one or two small children, might live in this house. Of a kind hardly paralleled in the Balkans, except in the poorer parts of southern Greece, it was not common in Albania as a permanent dwelling. As soon as its master could scrape together the necessary money, he added a sitting-room. As he provided all the labour himself and needed to hire only one professional, a stone-mason who, like all his brethren in the Balkans, was also a carpenter, ten pounds sterling were enough. The sitting-room might be built on top of the kitchen (*shtëpi* or *shpi*, lit. 'house', from Lat. *hospitium*) or against one of its walls. It had a wooden floor, a chimney at one end, a window or two, a niche in the wall beside the hearth for the utensils for making coffee, and a few wooden pegs near the door on which to hang up rifles; it might also have a ceiling. It generally had a separate entrance, for sitting-rooms were men's apartments and Catholic, Moslem, and Orthodox Albanians all segregated their young women. The Catholics and Orthodox attributed this custom to plain jealousy, and the Moslems, less convincingly, to a desire to obey their Prophet's order. In the evening and when not at work outside during the daytime, the master of the house with his men guests reclined, ate and smoked in the sitting-room, while his wife and children remained in the draughty kitchen. But the men were less comfortable than might have been expected. Since Albanian chimneys seldom drew, acrid fumes from the wood fire filled the room and almost made them weep unmanly tears. But not quite, for if they succumbed, they would be derided as 'poor sticks' who 'would never see to shoot'.

Guests, in the form of family friends or strangers 'sent by God', often came for a night. Because there were no inns in the Albanian countryside except on the long-distance tracks used by pack-horses, it was the rule that a benighted stranger might claim supper and shelter till the morning from any house he saw. The hospitality was never refused or charged for, but travellers of standing were expected to give a sum proportionate not to the hospitality offered but to their supposed wealth.

As soon as the children in a two-roomed house grew up, its master must build again. His daughters went forth to live in their

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or incapacitated, one of his wife's relatives must come for her and bring her back, but that meant the extra trouble of letting them know that she was coming.

Each member of a household had a personal name. Though this was usually determined by the religion professed, Moslem first names were not uncommon among the Catholics. The usual cause seems to have been no more than a personal whim. Thus the junior bajraktar ('standard-bearer')[1] of Shalë, a Catholic, was called Avdi because his father was very friendly with a Moslem of that name at the time of his birth. Another interesting anomaly is found in the forty-three Orthodox villages of Shpat, near Elbasan, where the older men have two names, a Moslem one for public use and an Orthodox one for private. For some decades before Albania freed herself from Turkish rule these villages were pressed by the Moslems of Elbasan to abandon Christianity and, to save their faith and lives, camouflaged themselves as Moslems, giving themselves Moslem names, keeping the Ramazan fast, and so on, but evading circumcision. At intervals they fetched an Orthodox priest from Elbasan under cover of night so that in some dark stable he might marry the newly wed with Christian rites and baptize the newly born. So, to name only two examples, the apparently Moslem Tahir Baduri of Shelcan and Ymer Tullumi of Bujars are really the Christian Spiro Baduri and Vasil Tullumi. Religious persecution having ended when Albanian independence was attained, the Orthodox of Shpat shed their Moslem camouflage and gave only Christian names to their children. If Godolesh, the picturesque village north of Elbasan, had managed to hold out for only two years more against the pressure to 'turn Turk', it, too, might now still have been Christian. It failed to hold out, so that its middle-aged and young inhabitants are fanatical Moslems but the old still visit Orthodox churches in secrecy and grieve that they must lie in a Moslem grave. One sturdy old woman, who married soon after the conversion to Islam, boasted that she had had all her four sons baptized. One of them confirmed this to the author, saying he had often been told by Christian and Moslem alike that he smelt less than did other Moslems, an agreeable peculiarity which he attributed to his baptism. The Greeks too, who introduced Orthodox Christianity into Albania, subscribed to the belief that baptism takes away the smell from which all Moslems suffer.

[1] See Chapter XI.

264 least 15, with as many more waiting patiently for second table, and the dishes included a whole roast sheep, which the Major picked apart with his hands and distributed.

463 252 265 Professional cooks are found only in the towns and in new government stations. In Prizren and Scutari, many of these cooks are Turks and their dishes consist mostly of mutton with various kinds of vegetables. Personally I found this cuisine very tasty. They also make a fine *yughurt*. Pastry cooks form another special group, and concentrate on *baklava* and *kadaif*, the two honey desserts familiar to eaters in Greek restaurants in all countries. Although their products may be carried into the mountains, the pastry cooks themselves stay at home.

262 The mountaineers obtain almost all of their own food by farming and herding. Hunting provides little or none for most families, and the same is true of fishing. Along the Black Drin, just above Kukës, a few fish are sometimes caught, and welcomed in the kitchen. In Prizren, fresh river fish are sold in the market. But fish is an insignificant element in the Mountain Gheg diet. The same is true of wild vegetable products, shoots, berries, and the like, collected by women. Furthermore each family produces practically all of its own food, except for a little coffee and tea, and a bit of sugar and salt. Most families are too poor to afford these imported luxuries often. The significance of the absolute self-sufficiency of the Ghegs in their food supply is linked with local differences in geology, and must have a profound effect upon differences in physique attendant on diet.

241 [544] Farming is a family affair. The man buys the iron implements which he needs in town, and makes the rest of wood. He breaks the soil with a spade, and ploughs it with oxen. As he ploughs each furrow, his wife walks behind him with a basket of seed, sowing it. Later the women will do the weeding, and the whole family comes out to reap. If the crop is wheat, they cut off each head of grain with a sickle and put the heads in a bag; if maize, they pick the ears and braid the husks for drying. They thresh small grains and beans with flails. When the tobacco leaves are ripe, the men cut them carefully and hang them on their verandas or the sides of their houses to cure.